

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

July 31, 2019

The Honorable Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary McAleenan,

We write to express our strong objections to your signing of a “safe third country agreement” with the government of Guatemala. Under a “safe third country” agreement, asylum seekers who request asylum after passing through Guatemala could be returned to Guatemala without the ability to seek asylum in the United States. Not only would this effectively deny access to the United States’ asylum process to many individuals and families who potentially merit international protection, it is also fundamentally unworkable and clearly inappropriate for a country, such as Guatemala, that is facing elevated levels of public corruption, poverty, and violence.

Guatemala is not a safe place for vulnerable asylum seekers to seek refuge. At 26.1 homicides per 100,000, Guatemala remains one of the most violent countries in Latin America. In fact, the United States Department of State maintains a travel advisory for Guatemala, noting that “[V]iolent crime, such as armed robbery and murder, is common. Gang activity, such as extortion, violent street crime, and narcotics trafficking, is widespread. Local police may lack the resources to respond effectively to serious criminal incidents.” Moreover, an estimated 86,000 Guatemalans have pending applications for asylum in countries across the world.

Nor does Guatemala possess the capacity to economically and socially integrate any substantial number of asylum seekers. More than 50 percent of Guatemalans live below the poverty line; indigenous Guatemalans are disproportionately impacted. Furthermore, current economic growth of less than 3 percent is unlikely to lead to enough job creation to reduce poverty in the near term.

While we have long supported regional resettlement options for Central American refugees, this “safe third country” agreement blatantly ignores the conditions driving migration from Guatemala to the United States and may even serve to exacerbate them. We strongly urge you to immediately rescind this deeply misguided agreement and focus instead on strengthening the region’s refugee protection capacity and expanding legal, safe pathways for asylum seekers.

Sincerely,



NORMA J. TORRES
Member of Congress



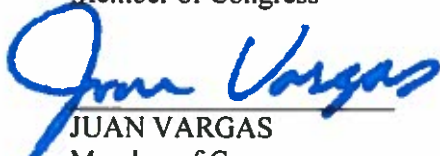
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DONALD S. BEYER
Member of Congress



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress



JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress



PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress




JAMIE RASKIN
Member of Congress



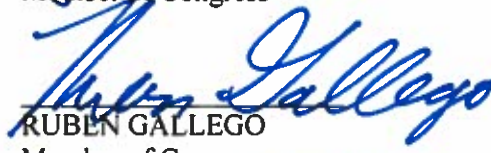
ALBIO SIRES
Member of Congress




TONY CARDENAS
Member of Congress



JESUS G. "CHUY" GARCÍA
Member of Congress



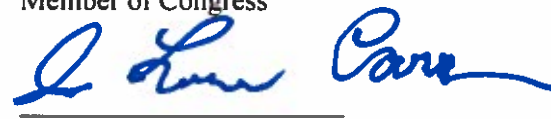
RUBEN GALLEGO
Member of Congress



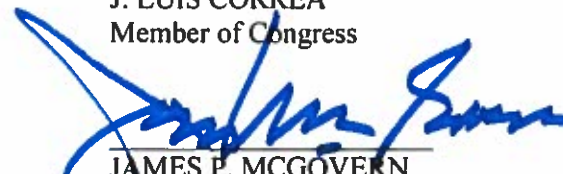
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT
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JAMES P. MCGOVERN
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AYANNA PRESSLEY
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